Poor Gamer's Almanac

Vol. II - Issue 5
July 2005

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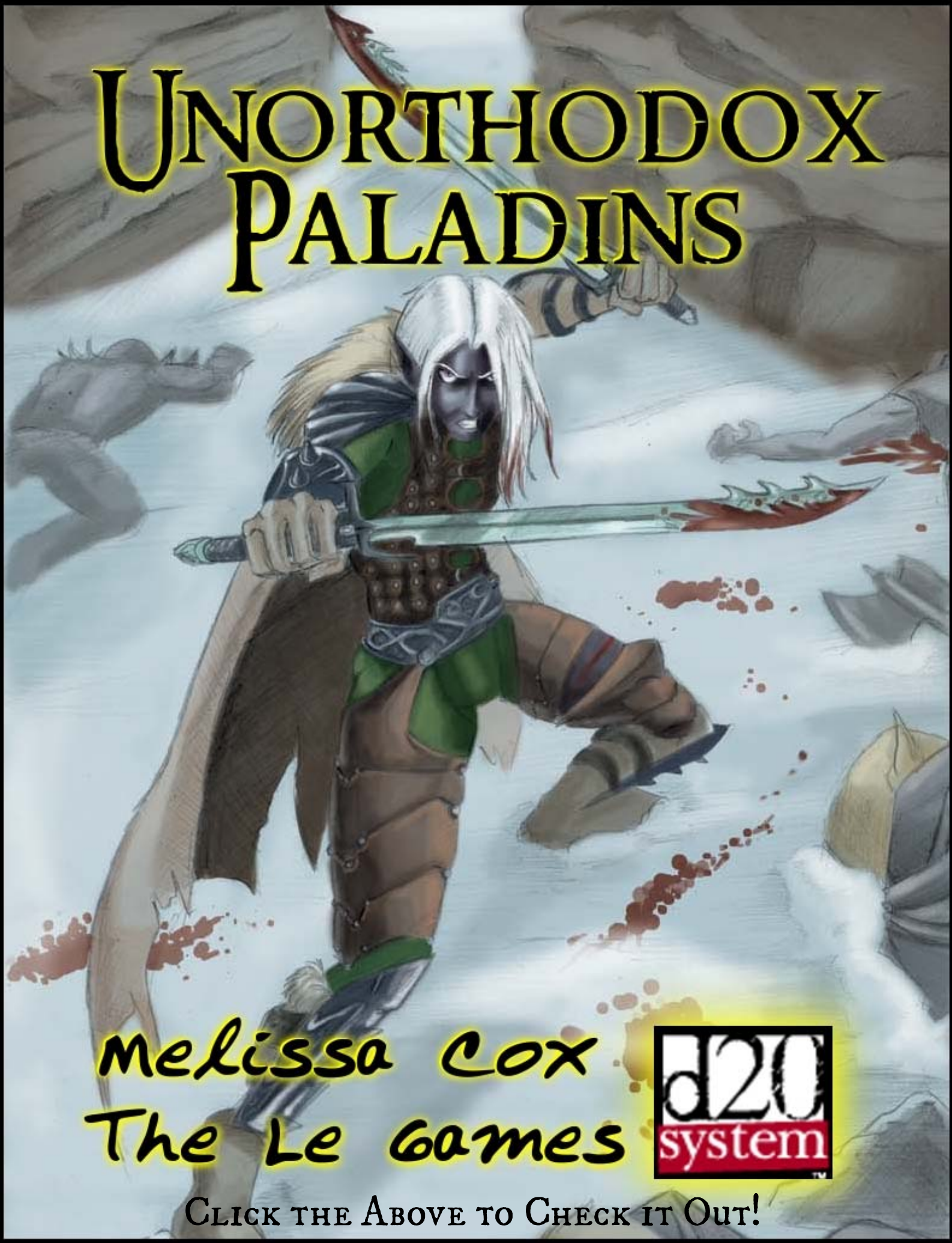

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The Le Games

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Issue 5—July 2005

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This month's cover art is done by Emily Veinglory. You can check out her site by clicking HERE. If you want to display your artwork as a cover or for future "Art Gallery" articles, please write to Joshua Raynack at jraynack@aleapublishing.com

We also like to thank Cecil Solomon, Toga Maria, The Le Games and Creative Mountain Games for their contributions for this month's issue of *Poor Gamer's Almanac.*

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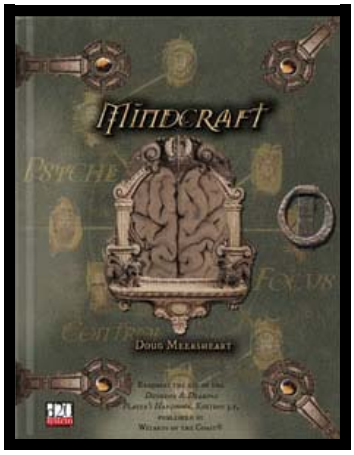

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Poor Gamer's Almanac

Thoughts From the Publisher

Welcome all to this month's *Poor Gamer's Almanac*. Hopefully most of you can manage to put down *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* for just a brief moment to check out what we have to offer this month (it has been a struggle for all of us here to stop reading).

First we would like to announce that we started offering advertising space at RPGNow.com in order to keep this magazine free. We would like to thank *The Le Games* and *Creative Mountain Games* for their advertising and contributions. It is through the contributive efforts that this month's magazine is free and will remain free (unlike some of other back issues which are $2.00). So check out their sites and see what they have to offer.

We are working diligently over here to make your .pdf experience even better then before—we are working on a project that will potentially change the way you look at .pdfs and the question: to print or not to print. The Alea Publishing Staff is working to get a sample done in time for the Dragon Con being held in Atlanta in the next couple of months. So if you are around Georgia and decide to head to the big event, we would like to see you.

We are also looking to produce a printed anthology of *Poor Gamer's Almanac* containing some of our best and your favorite articles of this year—so let us know which article you would like to see. Well, until next issue.

- Alea Publishing Group Staff

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This means you! Let this section grow into a Letters to the Editor section. Do you like what you see? Do you hate what you see? What would you like to grace these pages?

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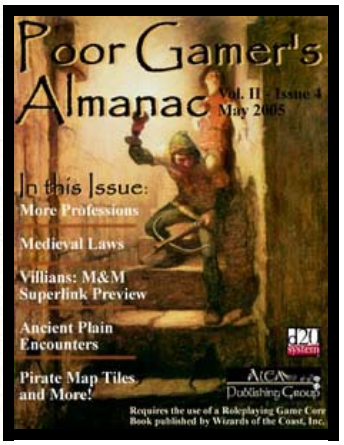
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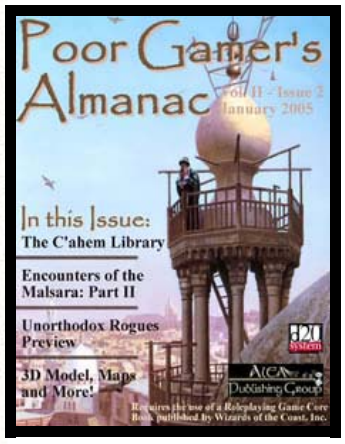
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Product Preview

The following pages are taken directly (well almost) from the revision of *A Question of Honor: A Guidebook to Knights*. It will include some changes but even more significant additions, like this Black Knight prestige class preview.

For those of you familiar with *A Question of Honor*, the black knight was a five-level prestige class. We have extended the class another five levels and stream-lined the abilities to better augment its initial design and intention.

Why the revision? Well, first of all—there was a lot of things we initially wanted to fit into the original that we simply did not have the rules for (jousting, rules for honor and corruption, a mass battle system, etc.). The rules that we had initially playtested for these systems were too convoluted or did not work and instead of cramming them in, we decided best to leave them out (that why we playtest our products!).

While some of these systems have grown quite extensive (Honor and Corruption will become its own product), others have been reworked and now the mechanics run smoothly. Additionally, this will also be a print product as well as a .pdf, therefore we want to give our customers the best we can give. Anyway enjoy the preview and let us know what you think by writing to us.

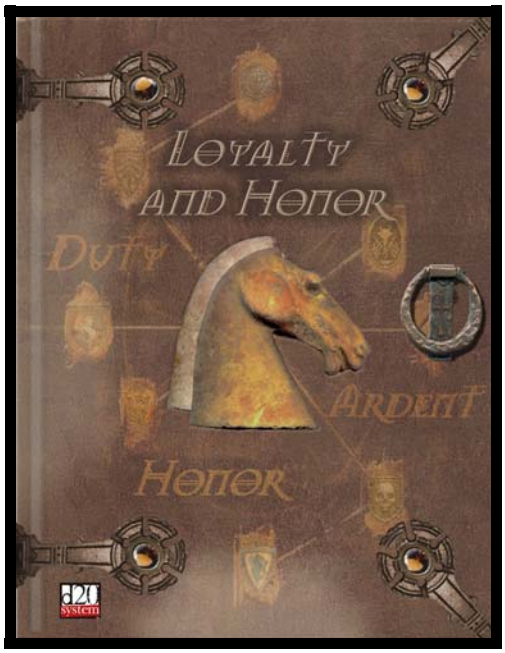

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Table PGA5-1: The Black Knight

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Heraldry Bonus	Special
1st	+1	+0	+0	+2	+0	Improved disguise, swift strike +1d6, quest
2nd	+2	+0	+0	+3	+0	Hidden motives, improved feint, up my sleeve
3rd	+3	+1	+1	+3	+0	Cunning emulation, poison use, swift strike +2d6
4th	+4	+1	+1	+4	+0	A hundred faces, hidden allegiances
5th	+5	+1	+1	+4	+1	Slippery mind, swift strike +3d6
6th	+6	+2	+2	+5	+1	Up my sleeve
7th	+7	+2	+2	+5	+1	A thousand faces, swift strike +4d6
8th	+8	+2	+2	+6	+1	Utterly convincing
9th	+9	+3	+3	+6	+2	swift strike +5d6
10th	+10	+3	+3	+7	+2	Collaborators, slippery aura, up my sleeve

"Milord, I wanted to stay with the others, but Sir Marcus ordered me to bear news. As you know, we were following the trail of Sir Vanbelk and his squires, to determine what had happened to them. Their trail led to a camp right outside the ruins of Hexeiden Castle, about a day's ride from Soul Keep. We found the squires butchered in their sleep, all but the one who was obviously on guard—his throat had been sliced. We also found several pieces of Sir Vanbelk's armor, but no sign of the man himself.

"We gathered our horses back together and rode to the old castle gate. Everyone else had dismounted when a knight in steel-gray armor appeared on the battlements by what was left of the western tower. Sir Marcus grabbed my knee and hissed for us all to freeze. The knight on the ramparts bore Vanbelk's sword—there is no mistaking that bright blade. Then Sir Marcus directed: 'Reginald, ride as you've never ridden before. Don't even bother to look back. Tell our liege that it looks like Vanbelk has taken the black. The rest of you, prepare yourselves.'

"I wheeled my horse around as orcs began pouring from the ruins. I heard the clash of steel as I urged the horse to gallop faster. I know nothing more, milord. Why would Vanbelk take the black? What does it mean?"

A black knight chooses to hide their identity for furthering purposes of good, evil, or to avenge a wrong.

Hit Die: d6.

Requirements

To qualify to become a black knight, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment: Any nonlawful.

Base Attack Bonus: +5.
Skills: Bluff 4 ranks, Disguise 4 ranks.
Feats: Skill Focus (disguise), Vigil.

Class Skills

The black knight's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Swim (Str), Use Magic Device (Chr).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the black knight.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A black knight gains no new proficiency with any weapon or armor.

Improved Disguise: The black knight gains a circumstance bonus equal to his black knight levels when using the Disguise skill.

Swift Strike: At 1st level, the black knight becomes skilled at taking down unwary targets quickly. He deals +1d6 points of damage on successful melee and ranged weapon attacks made against a flat-footed opponent. This extra damage can be lethal or nonlethal, as determined by the choice of weapon and the manner in which it's used.

The extra damage increases to +2d6 at 3rd level, +3d6 at 5th level, +4d6 at 7th level, and +5d6 at 9th level.

Quest: A black knight does not receive a -1 modifier for moving around a lot under the Followers-

Only Leadership Modifiers as described under the Leadership feat in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Hidden Motives: At 2nd level, the black knight increases his ability to hide his motives and intentions. He gains a circumstance bonus equal to his black knight levels when using Bluff against a Sense Motive skill. In addition, the DC for Bluff checks against his is increased by his levels of black knight.

Improved Feint: At 2nd level, a black knight gains the Improved Feint feat for free, as described in the *Player's Handbook*.

Up My Sleeve (Su): At 2nd level, the black knight gains the supernatural ability to pull a specific item out of thin air. As a move action, the black knight may cause any item currently in his possession (with a size no greater than Small) to disappear into an extra-dimensional space. The item becomes impossible to detect by any means, however *detect magical* aura spells will reveal a moderate magical aura around the hand that last held the item. As a move action, the black knight can cause the item to reappear in his hand. The black knight may only hide one item at a time in this fashion.

At 6th level, the black knight may use this ability to hide a single object of up to Medium size or up to two objects of up to Small size (each of which may be retrieved individually).

At 10th level, the black knight may use this ability to hide a single object of up to Large size or up to three objects of up to Small size (each of which may be retrieved individually).

Cunning Emulation: The black knight gains a circumstance bonus equal to his black knight levels to the Use Magic Device skill when attempting to emulate a class feature, ability score, race, and alignment.

Poison Use: Black knights are trained in the use of poison and never risk accidentally poisoning themselves when applying poison to a blade.

A Hundred Faces (Su): At 4th level, a black knight gains the supernatural ability to change his appearance at will, as if using the spell *change self* (see the spells section in the *Player's Handbook*).

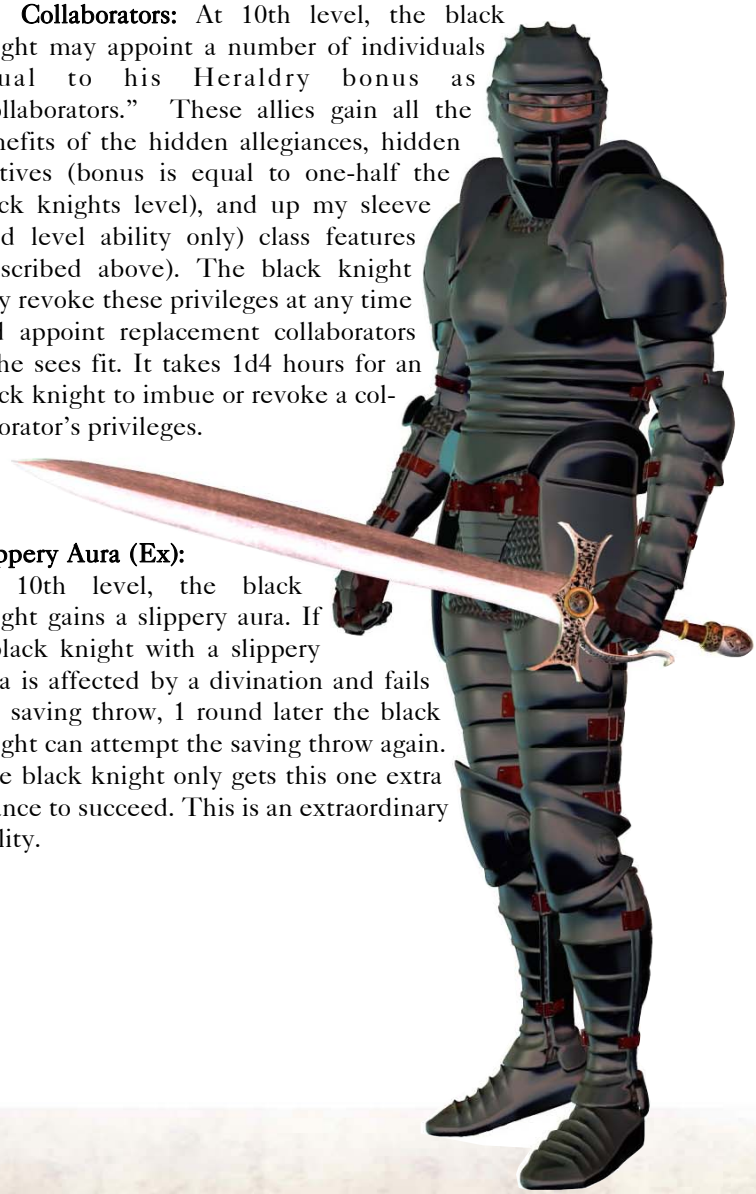
Hidden Allegiance (Su): At 4th level, the black knight gains the supernatural ability to suppress his loyalties, even from spells and abilities. In cases where such divinations are made, the black knight gains a Will save (DC 15 + the character level of the individual making the attempt) to negate the attempt. Negated attempts reveal either no alignment, evil, good, and so forth, or a lack of, as applicable for the ability or spell.

Slippery Mind (Ex): At 5th level, the black knight gains a slippery mind. If a black knight with a slippery mind is affected by an enchantment and fails the saving throw, 1 round later the black knight can attempt the saving throw again. The black knight only gets this one extra chance to succeed. This is an extraordinary ability.

A Thousand Faces (Su): At 5th level, a black knight gains the supernatural ability to change her appearance at will, as if using the spell *alter self* (see the spells section in the *Player's Handbook*).

Utterly Convincing: At 8th level, the black knight is a master at convincing people. Whenever the black knight uses some Charisma-based skills (see below), he adds a 1d6 to the result. The skills that utterly convincing applies to are: Bluff, Diplomacy, Disguise, Gather Information, Intimidate, and Perform.

Collaborators: At 10th level, the black knight may appoint a number of individuals equal to his Heraldry bonus as "collaborators." These allies gain all the benefits of the hidden allegiances, hidden motives (bonus is equal to one-half the black knights level), and up my sleeve (2nd level ability only) class features (described above). The black knight may revoke these privileges at any time and appoint replacement collaborators as he sees fit. It takes 1d4 hours for an black knight to imbue or revoke a collaborator's privileges.



Slippery Aura (Ex): At 10th level, the black knight gains a slippery aura. If a black knight with a slippery aura is affected by a divination and fails the saving throw, 1 round later the black knight can attempt the saving throw again. The black knight only gets this one extra chance to succeed. This is an extraordinary ability.

Forward and Artwork by Cecil Solomon,
Prestige Class by Cameron Guill and Joshua Raynack

Three Games of Chance

By Martin Ralya

In a fantasy world, games of chance need not be limited to the ones played in the real world, like Poker or Roulette. Presented below are three rather unusual games – Bag of Tricks, Iron Brew and Schooner – along with d20 System rules for playing them in your campaign.

Bag of Tricks

Generally played in a small fenced-in arena (most often called the "wooden ring"), this game literally involves a *bag of tricks*. Some gambling houses have several of these magic items on hand, but the gray variety is the one most commonly used.

Description: An ordinary dog or cat is placed in the ring, and gamblers are given some time to see how tough it looks, or how sickly, while the ringmaster stirs up excitement in the crowd. Gamblers bet on whether or not what comes out of the bag is going to be able to kill that dog or cat in a fight. When all bets are placed, the ringmaster reaches into his *bag of tricks* (gray), tosses a fuzzball into the ring, and commands the creature that it turns into to attack the animal that's already in the arena. What kinds of animals can be pulled from the bag is common knowledge among regulars, but it's not part of the ringmaster's spiel.

System: A *bag of tricks* (gray) produces one of the following animals at random: bat, rat, cat, weasel or badger. The GM can simply roll out the combat between the two animals (using the stats provided in the MM), but to keep the players more involved, have PCs who aren't betting on the match take on the roles of the two creatures in the arena.

PCs can use Knowledge (nature) (DC 15) or Survival (DC 15) to guess at the fighting ability of the cat or dog that starts out in the ring. Some GMs may wish to allow Handle Animal (DC 20) or Heal (DC 15) checks to provide information as well.

Betting: The minimum bet is 1 gp. The maximum bet depends on the type of *bag of tricks* used: gray, 5 gp; rust, 10 gp; tan 20 gp.

Payout: The payout for Bag of Tricks is always 2:1.

Variations: For a less bloody-minded game, gamblers can simply bet on what's going to be drawn from the *bag of tricks*, with no animal fighting involved. In this case, only use a *bag of tricks* (gray), and keep the minimum and maximum bets the same.

Instead of a *bag of tricks* (gray), a rust or tan bag can be used for this game. This requires a wooden ring large and strong enough to accommodate bigger creatures, and most gambling houses don't do this often, as the larger animals can be harder to obtain. For this option, the animal in the ring before the fight begins changes: use a wolf for a rust bag, and a lion for a tan bag.

Iron Brew

Several clans of dwarves claim to have invented this game, which has gained popularity with other races as well. Not a game of chance in the traditional sense, it often has a loyal following in the venues where it is played.

Description: Iron Brew isn't so much a game of chance as it is a test of skill that happens to be a lot of fun to gamble on. Most gambling houses only host one game of Iron Brew per month, with accommodations for just six competitors – which means there's nearly always a waiting list, as it can be a very popular game.

According to the tales told by masters of Iron Brew, the game was invented by dwarves centuries ago as a break from mining and fighting orcs. A group of dwarves would get together and try to see who could brew the best-tasting ale in a certain amount of time. They found the game particularly well suited to their lifestyle, as they could set the ale a-brewing, go off and kill goblins in the tunnels, and still have a game (and ale!) when they returned. Cheating is expressly forbidden.

To play Iron Brew, each contestant pays the house 20 gp to enter, and sets aside 30 gp for the pot. To keep things fair, the house provides six sets of

identical brewing equipment, which competitors are allowed to modify however they see fit. Naturally, the brewers bring their own ingredients. At the end of the month, an impartial judge is called in to taste each batch of ale, and she chooses a winner. The winner receives the pot, which is always 180 gp.

Anyone can bet on the outcome at any time during the month. They are not allowed to enter the brewing chambers, or to taste the ale before it's ready. The competitors can try and influence gamblers in any way they choose, and they frequently bet on themselves.

System: Success at Iron Brew is determined by use of Craft (brewing) checks. Profession (brewer) provides a +2 synergy bonus to these checks.

For the sake of simplicity, it takes one month to brew one barrel of ale, which holds thirty gallons. An average barrel of ale costs 6 gp. Each contestant makes Craft (brewing) checks (DC 12) once per week as normal, following the rules for the Craft skill in the PHB. Most good brewers will "complete" the batch of ale in the first week, which for our purposes just means they don't have to make any more skill checks to produce the ale – it still takes a month.

Because brewing a batch of ale for this game takes a full month, failing a Craft (brewing) check takes you out of the running – you simply don't have enough time to finish. This doesn't happen often in games of Iron Brew between experienced competitors, but it might once the PCs get involved!

At the end of the month, all of the competitors roll one final Craft (brewing) check – opposed by every competitor who remains in the game. For example, if two brewers dropped out because they missed Craft checks early on, and the remaining four brewers rolled 25, 13, 27 and 28 respectively, the brewer who got the 28 would win the check.

The judge then tastes each batch of ale, and chooses the one with the highest Craft check as the winner.

Whether or not the contestants remain the same, the judge *must* be changed for every game. A common rule is that no one can judge more than once a year. In the wealthiest of gambling houses, the brewing areas for Iron Brew are inside of their own *anti-magic field*.

Betting: Aside from the fixed entry fees, there is no minimum or maximum bet for Iron Brew. In especially heated contests, it's not unusual for the house to take in more than a thousand gold pieces, and pay out several hundred.

Payout: The house always pays out at 1:1 for Iron Brew. The pot is always 180 gp, and is provided by the contestants – betting with the house is separate from that.

Variations: Contestants are free to try and influence gamblers to bet on their batch, using Bluff to do so (opposed by Sense Motive checks). This often involves kickbacks, as in, "Lay your bet on *my* brew, and I'll give you ten gold pieces if I lose. If I win, you'll give *me* ten gold pieces." Particularly for regulars, these side bets can involve a serious amount of cash.

There are several families of gnomes known for their talent at brewing ale, and they *also* claim to have invented Iron Brew, which they call *ves'pireg*, or "Earth's Chosen." The only real difference between Earth's Chosen and Iron Brew is that gnomes tend to cheat like the dickens – spoiling each other's ale, adding ingredients, opening valves, you name it.

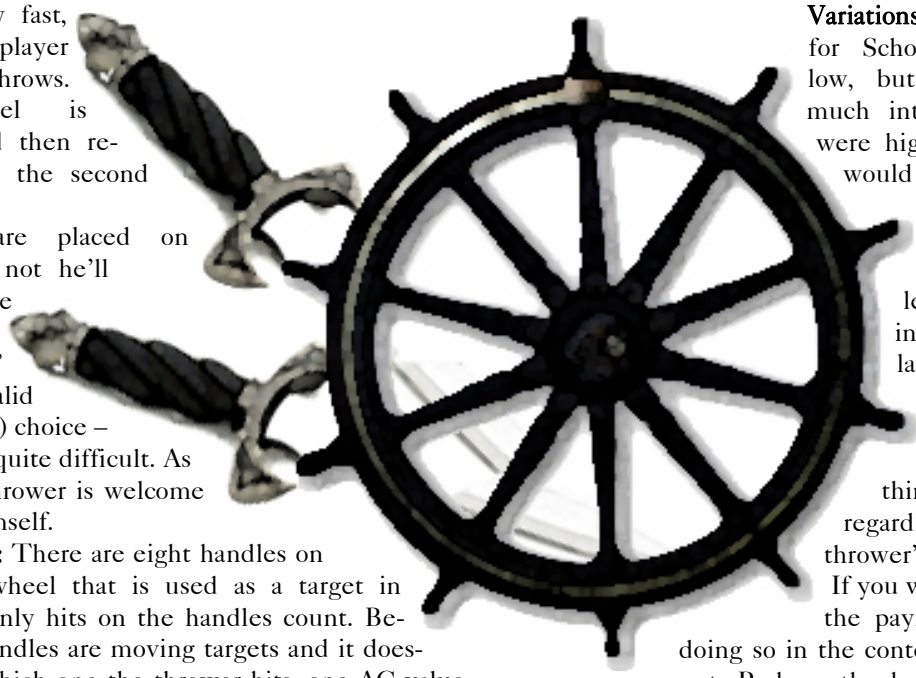
Schooner

Schooner is a knife-throwing game with a twist – literally! Schooner is very popular in port cities, especially in the seedier parts of town.

Description: In Schooner, the player throws special knives at a target, the target being the handles of a ship's wheel mounted on a wall, which is spun be-

fore the first throw. You can play Schooner with any sort of knives, but there are knives designed especially for the game. Schooner knives have a smooth, curved handle with a natural rest for one's index finger, but the blade is heavy and awkward, with and odd heft to it. They are designed to be very hard to throw, and using them is a point of pride for any serious Schooner player.

The player stands behind a ship's rail and decides how fast they want the wheel to be spun. The dealer spins the wheel at one of three speeds: slow, fast, or very fast, and the player gets two throws. The wheel is stopped and then respun before the second throw.



Bets are placed on whether or not he'll hit any of the handles, with "zero" being a valid (and popular) choice – Schooner is quite difficult. As usual, the thrower is welcome to bet on himself.

System: There are eight handles on the ship's wheel that is used as a target in Schooner. Only hits on the handles count. Because the handles are moving targets and it doesn't matter which one the thrower hits, one AC value is used to determine success or failure.

The thrower makes a ranged touch attack against the target. If he succeeds, he's sunk one knife into a handle.

At slow speed, the target is AC 18. On a fast spin, it's AC 20, and on a very fast spin, it's AC 20 with a 20% miss chance (as the handles are moving quickly enough to appear as a solid blur).

Using the traditional Schooner knives incurs a –4 equipment penalty to the thrower's attack roll. Treat these knives as daggers in all other respects (Weapon Focus (dagger) would apply normally, for example). As the knives are purposely built to be hard to throw, there is no way to offset this penalty.

Most gambling houses prohibit magic – spells or items – on the premises, but characters who were able to sneak in a means of enhancing their knife throwing skills can certainly cheat at Schooner. Apart from that, options for cheating are limited.

Betting: Minimum bet is 3 sp, maximum bet is 1 gp.

Payout: Two factors determine the payout: how fast the wheel is spun, and whether or not the thrower uses Schooner knives. For the speed, slow is 1:1, fast is 2:1, and very fast is 3:1. Using Schooner knives doesn't change the payout for a slow spin, but bumps it up to 3:1 for a fast one, and 4:1 for a very fast one. Although this gives beginners a chance to use balanced throwing knives on a slow spin at no penalty, there is a tremendous amount of social pressure not to do so – and no *true* Schooner player would even consider it.

Variations: The payout for Schooner is fairly low, but this is very much intentional: if it were higher, the game would be a ridiculously good moneymaker for most mid-level adventuring parties. Similarly, the 20% miss chance is present partly to keep things interesting regardless of the thrower's level.

If you want to increase the payment, consider doing so in the context of a special event. Perhaps the house arranges a contest with a small entry fee, and the winner is the thrower who hits the target the most times in ten throws. The house would be very reluctant to cover large bets, as a good thrower and a group of his friends (all betting on him, of course) could easily rack up a lot of money in a short time.

Writer's Bio

Martin Ralya (haiiro@3d6.org) *is a Utah-based professional who has been playing D&D since 1987. He loves gaming, and this is his ninth project as a freelance writer.*

Print out the Green Rat Hole and play Schooner right outside the privy.
Check out Cecil Solomon's WEBSITE for more paper tiles.
Make sure your Print to Fit option is turned off.

The Battle for Gorian's Rut

By Judd Smith

"After more than a year of arduous campaigns, the army of King Landor Hawk had pushed deep into the dominion of Arias the Destroyer. Now the ranks of armored knights fell into line of battle near the chasm known to all as Gorian's Rut. The day of atonement was at hand."

The Rise and Deification of Landor Hawk
Korth the Sage 151 AL

Lan Mark'd screamed as he charged, "Death to the destroyer, down with Arias!"

Those knights still within shouting distance took up the cry. Other knights who were farther away in the line heard only the massive thundering rumble of one thousand heavily armored warhorses as the entire left flank of King Landor Hawk's army swept forward in the charge. A thousand knights, charging under the holy silver standard of Mark'd, rushed across the open plain which divided them from the black clad legion of Arias the Foul.

Mark'd had been just a boy when Arias's legions had swept down from the north over a decade ago. The new kingdoms of the south had succumbed to the depredations of his army. Niatrientes had been first, laid waste. Her king was killed and army routed; the once proud nation was reduced to fine ash. Next the city-states on the Avenger River crumbled in the face of the seemingly unstoppable horde. In short order, the tide of battle had washed over the Empire's northern border. Raids and assaults burned grasslands and forests. Indeed, the Crystal Citadel, Hawk's capital, had been captured through treachery. Now, after ten years of near defeat and constant retreat, the king had turned back the tide and trapped Arias's army near the ancient crag, Gorian's Rut. Now the righteous would prevail. It was time for the king and Lan Mark'd to have their revenge.

The thousand came on with raging battle cries and unfurled banners. Mark'd had feared that the king's thin line of infantry could not hold while the heavy knights of the household cavalry swept around the right flank of their densely packed adversary. It appeared to him however, that Arias's generals had deployed poorly on the difficult ground and that the king's tactics might indeed win the day.

Arias had deployed his vast legion en masse. In places the lines were a dozen ranks deep, better to grind down the enemy under the weight of numbers. Initially the tactic had met with success. His infantry pushed, and nearly broke, the thinner line of the king's crimson liveried men-at-arms. Each foot of ground gained had exposed more of the legion's flank, however, and the heavy knights thundered in to exploit the advantage. Arias's commanders hastily tried to shift the unwieldy formations to meet the terrifying onslaught bearing down on them. The knights's great charge was a wave of silver and gold shimmering over the ocean of grass glimmering in the afternoon sun.

In hopes of stalling the assault Arias ordered his mounted lancers to counter-charge the grim-visaged Landorian knights. It was a false hope. The lancers melted away as snow at the coming of spring in the face of the implacable foe. The world crashed. Arias's foot soldiers found themselves adrift in a sea of blood. The silver armored knights shattered the flank and drove deep into the formation of dying legionnaires. Mark'd was there among them, slashing and hacking his way through the melee. He cut a swath through the ring of dark-hearted warriors and drew ever closer to the object of this day's fury, all the while shouting a litany of prayers and evocations.

"We have them! Press the advantage! Purge the blood of the infidel with your steel! Let the holy king himself guide your hands this day!"

Lan Mark'd was a silver armored juggernaut of death.

Arias saw his danger and appreciated the plight of his situation. The banner of Hawk's champion drew ever closer even as scores of his soldiers fell in the maelstrom. The inevitable was approaching riding a barded warhorse under a silver standard. The battle had turned rapidly against him; his line of retreat was being severed. A rout was in the offing. Meanwhile, Mark'd's banner surged steadily forward.

"So be it then." Arias muttered aloud.

For ten years he had been victorious. Pacts had been made and the promises of victory had come and gone. His kingdom, which had once extended as far as his sword arm could reach, was crumbling. Landor Hawk had finally drawn enough support to oppose him. The half dozen, gibbering, gore craving fiends he served were, at long last, calling for him to pay penance for the multitude of souls he had sent into

the Dead Lands. His long ago made pacts assured him no illusions about his fate: eternal torment in some pit of the abyss created just for his foul soul. Better, though, to bring someone along to share the walk along that last path of damnation. Lan Mark'd was such a man. Why he had not killed Mark'd all those years ago Arias could not explain.

It would have been so easy then. The young knight had struggled and been sorely wounded fighting against the ambush of Arias's dark legionnaires. Arias had personally overseen the quick massacre that had destroyed King Landor Hawk's household guard, the hand picked knights that were detailed to protect the king's most valuable treasure, her highness Queen Tamira. Only Mark'd had survived. His position in front of the Queen's coach was littered with a half-score of dead and dying legionnaires. Mark'd, Arias recalled, was leaning, partially conscious, on his ancient broadsword. Barely alive he watched Arias step forward and club the queen into submission with a gauntleted fist. Mark'd locked eyes on those gauntlets, already covered in the blood of his companions, as they closed on the ivory throat of his queen. Arias halted several times to allow the woman to gasp out prayers to the All Mother and then agonizingly tightened his grip to crush the life out of the queen. Finally the All Mother took the queen's soul into the Hallowed Halls. Through it all Mark'd only stared at Arias. Much, Arias thought now, like a gravedigger eyes a coffin to arrive at the correct size for the hole he is about to dig. Yes, he should have killed him then.

"But I'll kill him now." Arias, forsaking direction of the lost battle, swung into his saddle and plunged unescorted into the fray.

Gore and ichor dripped off Mark'd's blade and his arm felt afire. A dozen small wounds pinpricked him, but he was resolute in his desire to see his quarry brought to bay. He dispatched another of the legionnaires fighting amid the rapidly disintegrating enemy. Looking up, he saw the goat headed banner of Arias the Devourer pushing towards him through the ranks of death. It seemed the villain had decided to play his final cards.

"So much the better." Mark'd thought aloud as he drew the last reserves of strength into his massive frame.

The murderer of his king's wife would die this day. For years he had burned to end the suffering that lay on his soul. He recalled the fateful day when he had been a young knight wounded in battle with Arias and unable to do naught but watch Queen Tamira be tortured and strangled by Arias's own hands. He had sworn then, as Tamira's soul departed for the Hallowed Halls, that before he took his last breath Arias would suffer. By Mark'd's blade the defiler would be sent to the hells that spawned him.

Flushed with his triumph and the bravado born of pacts with vile and wretched demons, Arias had let Mark'd live to relate the story to his king. This day Arias would regret that decision. The moment of atonement had come.

The melee around Mark'd had nearly played itself out. A fire of that intensity could not burn long. Fugitives fled and were chased off by the remaining Landorian knights. As the antagonists drew near a strange and surreal quiet, which comes only to the most violent of fields, fell over the ground. Arias reigned in a few feet from the champion. In the eye of the hurricane the two stood, taking in each other's bloodied faces.

"The time is at hand, boy. Time to finish what I started at that caravan all those years ago!" Arias chuckled at his own mirth and raised his sword in a mocking Landorian salute.

Mark'd's silence and impassive stare unset-

tled the legion's commander. Chafed by the insolence, Arias slammed down his helmet's visor and spurred his mount forward.

Only the silver knight's lightening reflexes allowed him to parry the shearing blow aimed at decapitating him. The eye of the hurricane had passed. The swirling dervish of battle had returned.

His impromptu charge carried Arias past the knight, yet his expert horseman's instincts wheeled the thoroughbred charger it a scant heartbeat. He realized though, that the boy he had defeated then was no longer a young knight new to his spurs. Here before him was a dangerous and capable opponent bent on his destruction: a fitting soul indeed to lead his into hell.

The muck of battle clawed at his mount's hooves as he clashed blades again with Mark'd. He shouldered aside, with great effort, Mark'd's savage counterattack. The heavy blades rang and sparks flew. It was rumored that the All Mother herself had blessed Mark'd's broadsword. Arias was beginning to believe it was charmed as the knight and his blade had foiled a half dozen well-placed strikes.

Mark'd knew that the battle must end quickly. Arias had assaulted him time and time again and his last reserves of strength were almost gone. Arias was a swift and deadly opponent, made doubly so by his pacts with the dark ones. Endgame was nigh and the powerful despot would soon overwhelm Mark'd. His dreams of atoning for his weakness so many years gone by would end with his life's blood pouring out, a sacrifice for the foul one's abominable masters.

Arias, by charging into the fray to meet him had played his last hand, perhaps the time had come for Mark'd to lay his last cards on the table. He decided to play to the vanity of the demon, one last ruse, which, if it worked, would bring victory to the day. If not, well, so be it.

On the next pass Mark'd sighed with effort and looped a lazy sword stroke at his opponent's body. Arias sensed the weakness and began chuckling at the flagging knight. He parried the clumsy blow, now laughing behind his helmet. No sooner than their blades touched, however, did Mark'd's sword point come up and bury itself deep in the slotted visor of Arias's great helm.

A gurgling sound seeped forth from the helmet replacing the contemptuous laugh as Arias drowned in his own fluids. Thick blood spilled over his gorget and down the front of his armor, blending into the color of the coal black breastplate. The once powerful warlord's inert form slumped from the saddle and collapsed onto the corpse- riddled field.

Weariness overcame Mark'd as he glanced at Arias prostate on the ground below and thought of the old saying his mentor had once told him, "It is always a good day when your enemies die."

Queen Tamira was avenged and Mark's felt cleansed. His weakness was expunged. He stared around the field, over the offal of battle, and saw at the far end of the battleground Hawk's royal ensign. As he watched a sudden afternoon wind tugged the banner to out to its full dimension.

The Bloody Tusk Tribe

By Joshua Raynack

This month we begin to look at the various orc tribes that inhabit the Hill Lands, featured in *A Question of Honor: A Guidebook to Knights*. We begin with the Bloody Tusk tribe and expands upon our free game enhancement, *Orc Culture in the Hill Lands* found at our website: www.aleapublishing.com.

However, before we do, this article features a class template that was first featured in *A Question of Loyalty: A Guidebook to Military Orders*. So we have briefly outlined the rules below to better understand the concept as well as the idea behind it.

What is a class template?
A class template attaches to a character much like a monster template attaches to a monster, however instead of getting all the special abilities at once, you receive as you gain levels in your particular class. Just as with gaining abilities in a character class, you gain the additional abilities of your class template as well as your abilities gained normally from your class.

How do I acquire a class template?
Class templates have minor requirements, much like prestige classes, that must be met before attaching a class template to a character and all requirements can usually be attained while creating a character.

What are the other costs?
Most of the class templates presented in this book and other future products give you a level adjustment much like a monster template or when playing a monster or advanced race (see *DMG* Chapter 6: Characters).

What are the benefits to having a class template?
Class templates allow you to expand your core character concept without having to choose alternative classes or they allow you to integrate and expand with supplements presenting alternative character classes. Also, besides the special abilities, they allow players to access special feats restricted only to certain members of the order as well as gaining bonus class skills.

What is the purpose of the class template?
The book provides a perfect example how a class template can effect your game or character. Military orders flourished in the middle ages as knights enlisted to further the religious cause during the crusades. However, when designing the various knight prestige classes in *A Question of Honor: A Guidebook to Knights*, there was always the realization that knights were not the only members that existed in a military order. There were sergeant-brother (soldiers whom could not become a knight for lack of a noble birth), turcopoles (local troops that fought along side of order knights, scouts, as well as other lesser positions to make the order run properly. In a fantasy game, especially, a ranger or fighter may join an order to scout for the cause and receive benefits that belonging to an institution might provide without having to have a knightly prestige class.

In other aspects, such as guilds, provide an ample opportunity to reap the benefits a class template offers. Fighters often join thief guilds, though not swift, they provide the muscle as guards and extortion operatives. Mage guilds also attract rogues, loyal to the cause, to steal magical knowledge from rivals. What best way to employ those with tasks, whom are skilled in their trade and loyal to the guild or order.

Also, in designing the class template, it allows a player freedom of choice. They are not restricted to playing a "concept" or alternative character class, nor do they have the frustration to choose between multiple prestige classes, or even the complexities and slow advancement of multiclassing.

On a final note, belonging to a guild or a order should mean more than paying dues, adventure hooks, or possible role-playing opportunities it may provide. This allows the player to become enmeshed in the order, reap the rewards for belonging to something bigger then themselves, and visibly see the impact belonging to an institution imparts.

The Bloody Tusk Tribe

More of a collection of bandits, warriors, thugs, and barbarians, rather than an orc tribe, the Bloody Tusk Tribe jealously guards the road leading to Xorn. Though under the influence of the Great Orc Seer Tree, they distrust magic of any kind, and thus disembowel any shaman or adept from the Hill Rock Tribe that travels in their area. This often leads to skirmishes between each of their borders.

Chaos rules among its members, as each day the chieftain is required to fight the first challenger in order to retain his throne. The fights mostly occur

within cleared slave pits or within a circle of clawing, stabbing orc warriors. Bol'das the Fist, present chieftain, has firmly held his title for nearly six months. He is one of the longest chieftains to hold a title in the tribe's verbal history.

Induction: The Bloody Tusk Tribe does not allow those who wield any sort of magic, divine or otherwise, into the tribe. Those who are able to cast spells are not allowed to become a member of the Bloody Tusk Tribe. Young children showing an affinity for such talent are ritually sacrificed.

Humans, especially those who share the chaos and strength that the orcs respect, are allowed to join among them. They, however, can never challenge the chieftain. Nor can they take any orc mates unless they kill their guardian or lover in combat. However, they may mate freely with half-orcs.

Banishment: A character who is banished from a tribe loses all class template abilities, however still retains the level adjustment and Tribe class ability.

The Bloody Tusk (Class Template)

Favored Class: Barbarian
Level Adjustment: +1

Requirements

To qualify as a member of the Bloody Tusk Tribe a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment: Any chaotic, nongood.
Skills: Intimidate 2 ranks.
Race: Orc, Half-Orc, Human.

Table PGA5-2: The Bloody Tusk Tribe

Level	Special
1st	Superstitious, tribe, tribal feats(s), tribal skills
4th	Orc blood
5th	Robust
10th	Stamina
15th	Second wind
20th	Remain conscious

Class Features

All the following are additional features of the Bloody Tusk class template. These features are extra to the class abilities that are acquired normally through advancement in a character class.

Orc Blood: As a human, you have been fully accepted into the orc tribe. At 4th level, a human Bloody Tusk member gains Orc Blood as a bonus feat (see below for details).

Remain Conscious: At 20th level a Bloody Tusk member gains the ability to continue to perform actions when he or she would otherwise be considered unconscious and dying. When the character's hit points reach –1, the character can perform as though he or she were disabled, making either an attack action or a move action every round until the character reaches –10 hit points (and dies) or the character's hit points return to 1 or higher. The character can choose to succumb to unconsciousness if he or she thinks that doing so might prevent him or her from taking more damage.

Robust: At 5th level, a Bloody Tusk tribal member becomes especially robust, gaining a number of hit points equal to his or her class level as soon as he or she gains this ability. Thereafter, the character gains +1 hit point with each class template he or she gains.

Second Wind: At 15th level, a Bloody Tusk tribal member gains the ability to achieve a second wind. When the character does this, he or she recovers a number of hit points equal to his or her Constitution modifier. A character can do this a number of times a day equal to their Constitution modifier. This ability does not increase the character's hit points beyond the character's full normal total.

Stamina: Beginning at 10th level, a Bloody Tusk tribal member recovers twice as fast as normal. So, the character recovers 2 hit points per character level per evening of rest, 2 points of temporary ability damage per evening of rest, and awakens in half the normal time after being knocked unconscious.

Superstitious: At 1st level, a Bloody Tusk member gains Superstitious as a bonus feat (see below for details).

Tribe: A member of the Bloody Tusk Tribe has a +2 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy checks when dealing with other members of the same tribe. This ability also prevents a character from joining another tribe by any means, regardless of banishment from the Bloody Tusk Tribe Tribe.

Tribal Feat(s): As member of the Bloody Tribe, you are allowed access and are free to select Tribal Feats which you meet the prerequisite.

Tribal Skills: The following are considered class skills regardless of character class: Climb (Str), Intimidate (Cha), and Survival (Wis).

Feats

The following feats allow characters to enhance their capabilities or add new abilities to the ones they already possess and are accessible to all Bloody Tusk Tribe members.

Ancestral Feats

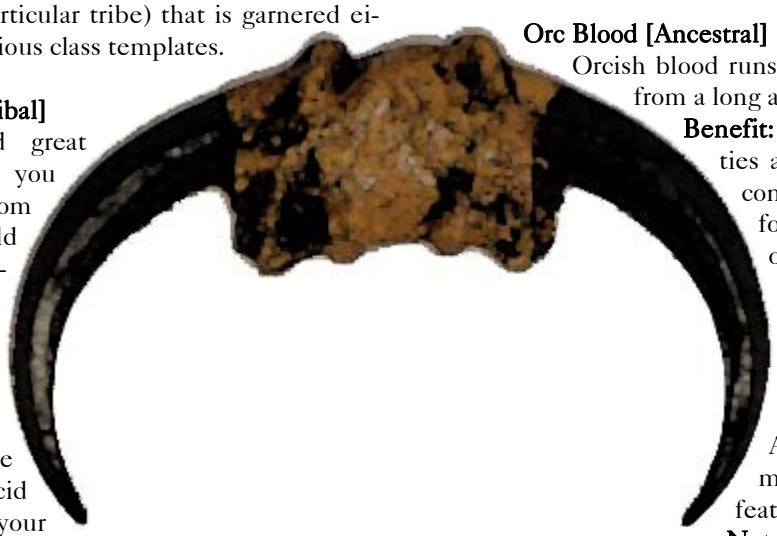
Someone in your ancestry has provided you with racial blood or other similar abilities. All Ancestral Feats may only be taken at 1st level.

Taboo Feats

Taboo feats tend to be a little more powerful than other feats since the character selecting the feat must select a restriction. If a character breaks the taboo and returns to their old habits, they immediately lose the abilities of the feat and do not regain these abilities until they are the a recipient of an *atonement* spell.

Tribal Feats

Tribal feats represent techniques, enlightenments, or divine gifts offered to only members of a particularly tribe. All Tribal feats require you to have the Tribal class ability (of a particular tribe) that is garnered either through the various class templates.



Acid Resistance [Tribal]
Your heritage and great constitution allow you resist damage from sources that would harm a normal creature.
Prerequisite: Tribal (Bloody Tusk Tribe) class ability, Con 13+.
Benefit: You ignore an amount of acid damage equal to your Constitution modifier.
Special: You may take this feat multiple times. Its effects stack.

Cold Resistance [Tribal]
Your heritage and great constitution allow you resist damage from sources that would harm a normal creature.
Prerequisite: Tribal (Bloody Tusk Tribe) class ability, Con 13+.
Benefit: You ignore an amount of cold damage equal to your Constitution modifier.
Special: You may take this feat multiple times. Its effects stack.

Electric Resistance [Tribal]
Your heritage and great constitution allow you resist damage from sources that would harm a normal creature.
Prerequisite: Tribal (Bloody Tusk Tribe) class ability, Con 13+.
Benefit: You ignore an amount of electricity damage equal to your Constitution modifier.
Special: You may take this feat multiple times. Its effects stack.

Fire Resistance [Tribal]
Your heritage and great constitution allow you resist damage from sources that would harm a normal creature.
Prerequisite: Tribal (Bloody Tusk Tribe) class ability, Con 13+.
Benefit: You ignore an amount of fire damage equal to your Constitution modifier.
Special: You may take this feat multiple times. Its effects stack.

Orc Blood [Ancestral]
Orcish blood runs through your veins from a long ancestor.
Benefit: For all special abilities and effects, you are considered an orc. You for example, can use orc weapons and magic items with racially specific orc powers as if you were an orc.
Special: As with all Ancestral feats, you may only take this feat at 1st level.
Note: This feat first appeared in *A Question of Honor: A Guidebook to Knights*.

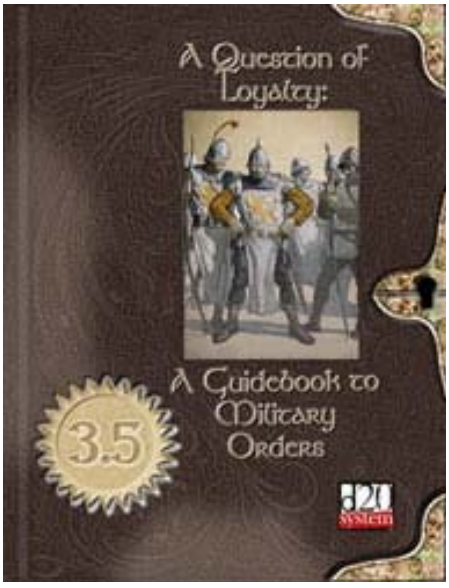
Show of Strength [Tribal]
You rippling muscles speak for you.
Prerequisite: Tribal (Bloody Tusk Tribe) class ability, Str 13+.
Benefit: You may use your Strength modifier instead of your Constitution modifier when using the Intimidate skill.

Sonic Resistance [Tribal]
Your heritage and great constitution allow you resist damage from sources that would harm a normal creature.
Prerequisite: Tribal (Bloody Tusk Tribe) class ability, Con 13+.
Benefit: You ignore an amount of sonic damage equal to your Constitution modifier.
Special: You may take this feat multiple times. Its

effects stack.

Superstitious [Taboo]
You fear magic of any type and cast a watchful eye on spellcasters.
Prerequisite: A class without a spell list.
Benefit: You receive a +3 morale bonus to saving throws against all magic. This also includes beneficial magic from spells and magic items that bestow such magic, (i.e. *potions* and *wands*) with which you must also always make a saving throw against. In addition, you refuse to cast spells, from any source.
Special: Like all Taboo feats, if you break the taboo, you loose the benefits of this feat until you are the recipient of an *atonement* spell. In addition, if you later acquire a class that contains a spell list you permanently lose the benefits of this feat despite being a recipient of an *atonement* spell.
Note: This feat first appeared in *A Question of Honor: A Guidebook to Knights*.

If you like the concept of the rules in this article then click below to see where it all happened!



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Orc Tribes and Tribal Influence Map

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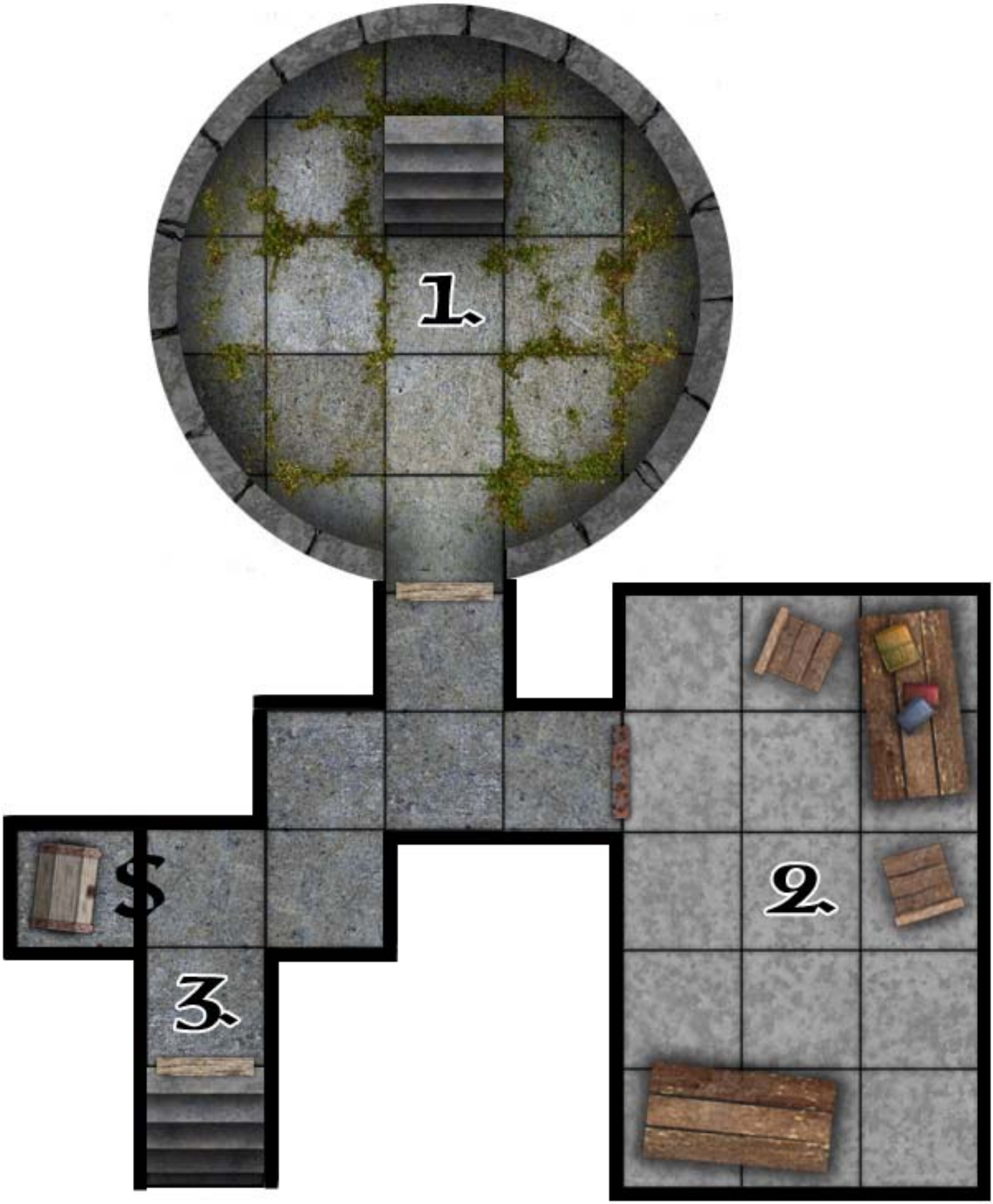

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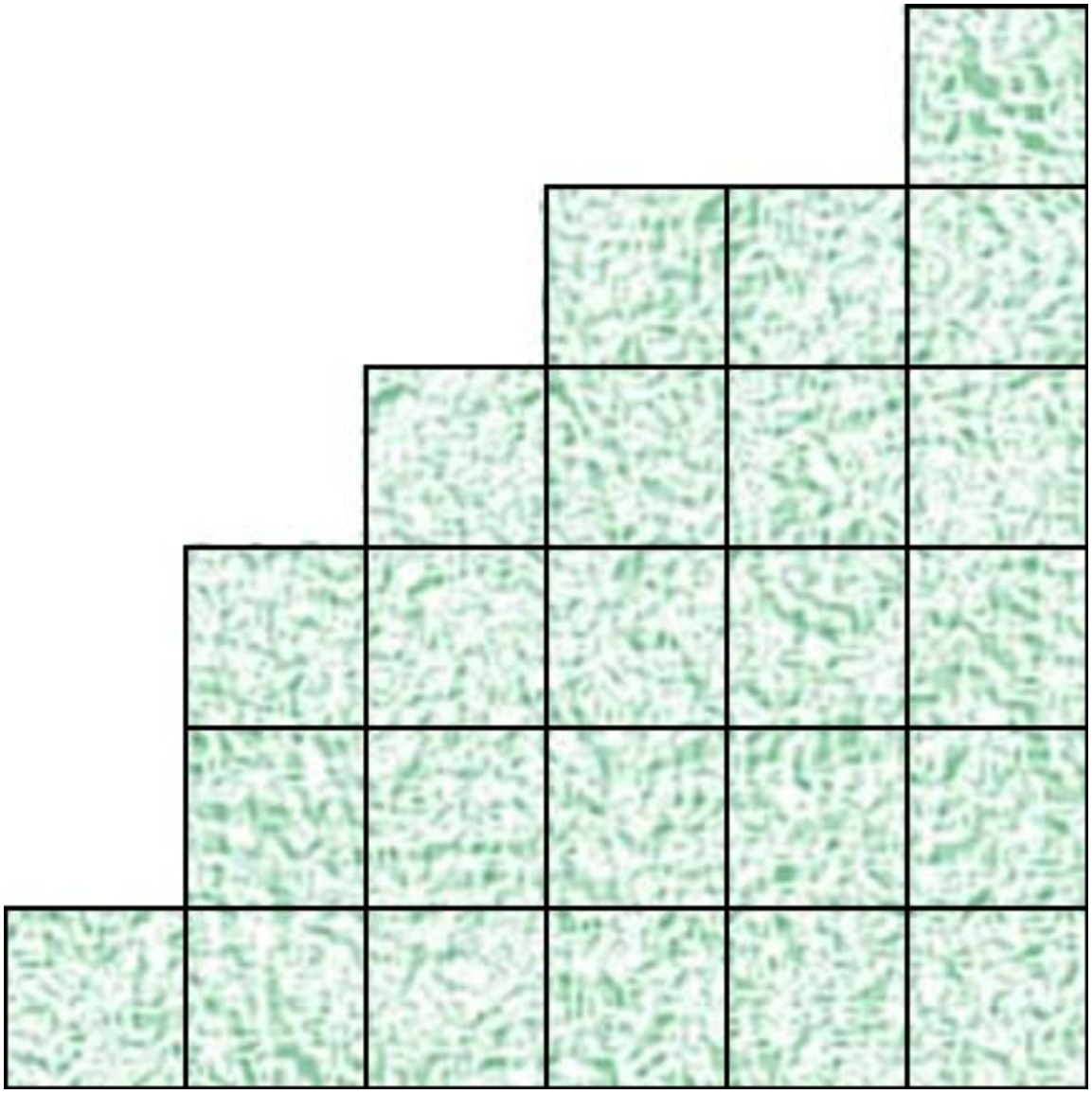

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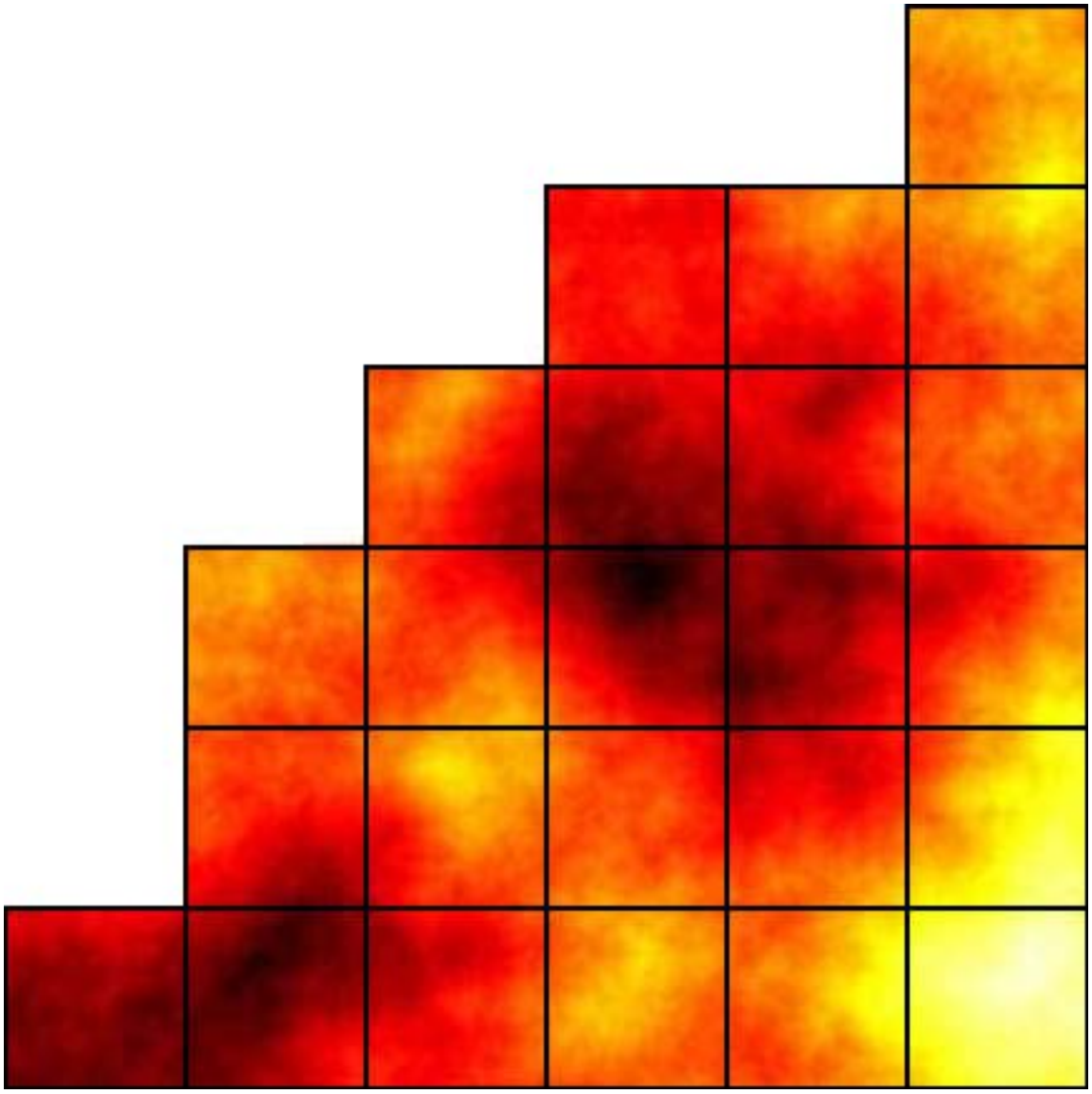

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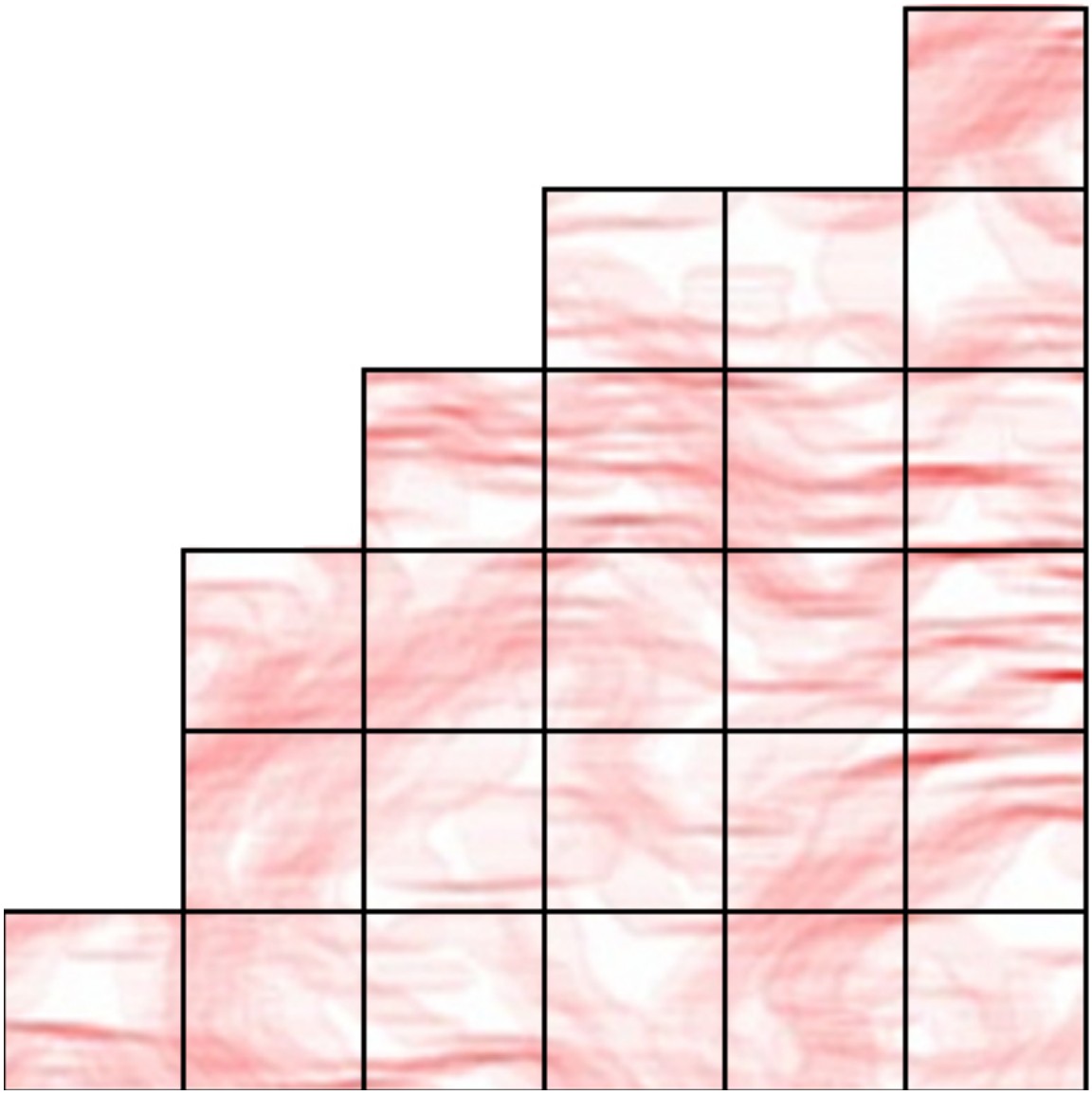

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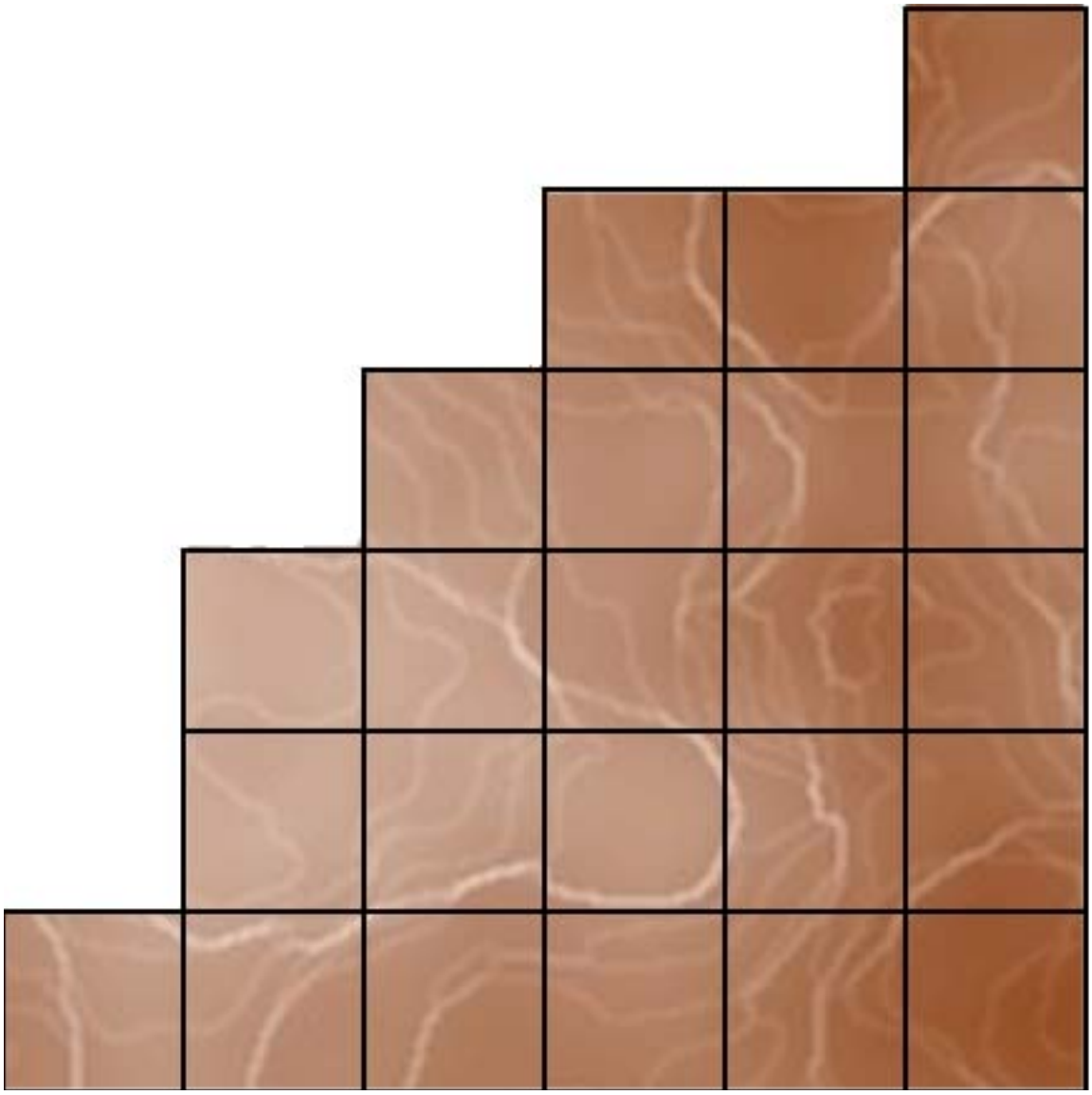

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Fatigue Feats

By Joshua Raynack

This article features a new type of feat: the fatigue feat. Fatigue feats signify your character stretching beyond their normal capabilities to produce some extraordinary action. Fatigue feats can be used once a day without any ill effects. However, if you use the ability more than once per day, you immediately become fatigued—if you are already fatigued you are exhausted.

If a creature is immune to fatigue or incapable of becoming fatigue or exhausted, you cannot activate a fatigue feat. Note: not all of these feats our fatigue feats (we thought to drop a few extra that was cooking in our noggins).

Abrupt Drop
You can drop things at a moments notice.
Prerequisite: Dodge.
Benefit: You may drop an item or drop to the prone position as an immediate action rather than a free action. You also receive an additional +2 bonus to your Armor Class against ranged attack while you are prone (see Chapter 8: Combat in the *Player's Handbook* for more details).

Arduous Casting (Fatigue)
Your determination can push the limits of spellcasting.
Prerequisite: Con 13+, ability to cast spells.
Benefit: You may cast an additional quickened spell or a spell that has an immediate or swift casting time in a round.
Normal: You can only either cast one quickened spell or a spell that has an immediate or swift casting time in a round.
Special: Like all Fatigue feats, after using the benefit of this feat beyond the normal once per day, you are now fatigued. If you are already fatigued, you are now exhausted. Exhausted characters cannot make use of a Fatigue feat.

Arduous Combat (Fatigue)
You enable yourself to make additional attack by pushing yourself.
Prerequisite: Con 13+, Combat Reflexes.
Benefit: You may cast make an additional attack as if you were under the effects of a *haste* spell.
Special: Like all Fatigue feats, after using the benefit of this feat beyond the normal once per day, you are now fatigued. If you are already fatigued, you are now exhausted. Exhausted characters cannot make use of a Fatigue feat.

Arduous Move (Fatigue)
You enable yourself to make additional move action by pushing yourself.
Prerequisite: Con 13+.
Benefit: You may cast make an additional move action as if you were under the effects of a *haste* spell.
Special: Like all Fatigue feats, after using the benefit of this feat beyond the normal once per day, you are now fatigued. If you are already fatigued, you are now exhausted. Exhausted characters cannot make use of a Fatigue feat.

Arduous Range (Fatigue)
You can increase the range increment of a ranged or thrown weapon.
Prerequisite: Con 13+.
Benefit: You may double the range increment of a ranged or thrown weapon, with which you are proficient, for one attack.
Special: Like all Fatigue feats, after using the benefit of this feat beyond the normal once per day, you are now fatigued. If you are already fatigued, you are now exhausted. Exhausted characters cannot make use of a Fatigue feat.

Arduous Reach (Fatigue)
You can extend your reach by pushing yourself.
Prerequisite: Con 13+, medium-size creatures or larger.
Benefit: You may extend your reach by 5 feet for one attack.
Special: Like all Fatigue feats, after using the benefit of this feat beyond the normal once per day, you are now fatigued. If you are already fatigued, you are now exhausted. Exhausted characters cannot make use of a Fatigue feat.

Crusader's Charge (Fatigue)
You are able to make a full attack as part of a charge.
Prerequisite: Con 13+, Run.
Benefit: When performing a charge, you can follow with a full attack.
Special: Like all Fatigue feats, after using the benefit of this feat beyond the normal once per day, you are now fatigued. If you are already fatigued, you are now exhausted. Exhausted characters cannot make use of a Fatigue feat.

Strenuous Strike (Fatigue)
You are able to push the limits of your strength as your deliver a critical hit.
Prerequisite: Con 13+, Power Attack.
Benefit: You may declare a critical threat an automatic critical hit from a weapon you wield.
Special: Like all Fatigue feats, after using the benefit of this feat beyond the normal once per day, you are now fatigued. If you are already fatigued, you are now exhausted. Exhausted characters cannot make use of a Fatigue feat.

Meticulous Notes
You are diligent in the fine details when scribing a spell into your spellbook.
Prerequisite: Ability to cast arcane spells and a spellbook.
Benefit: You may cast spells from your spellbook as if casting from a scroll. After casting a spell in such a fashion, the spell and the page(s) it was written upon are gone. You can only cast spells from a spellbook that you have scribed yourself.
Normal: A wizard cannot cast spells from a spellbook.

Laborious Lunge (Fatigue)
You can deliver additional sneak attack damage to a foe.
Prerequisite: Con 13+, sneak attack or similar ability.
Benefit: You may deliver an additional die to your sneak attack damage.
Special: Like all Fatigue feats, after using the benefit of this feat beyond the normal once per day, you are now fatigued. If you are already fatigued, you are now exhausted. Exhausted characters cannot make use of a Fatigue feat.

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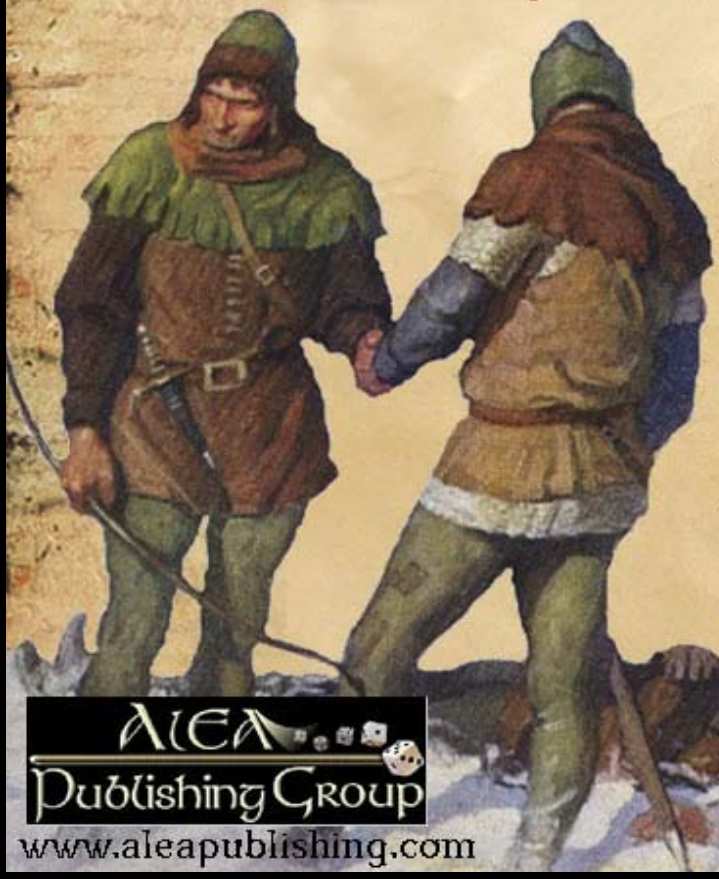

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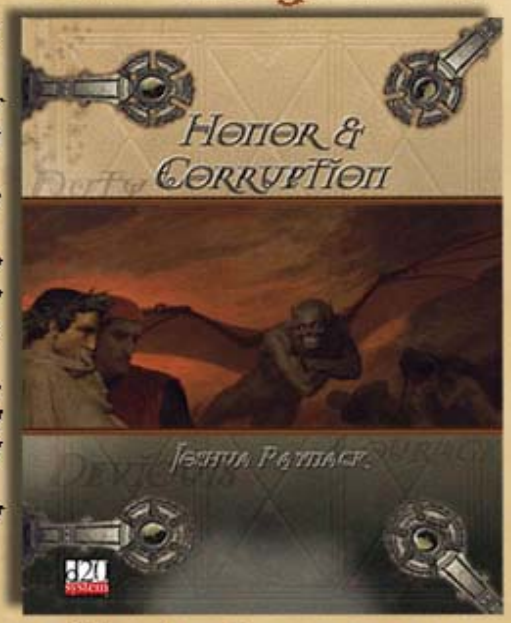

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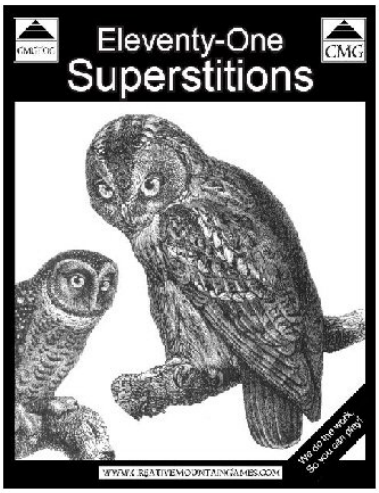

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